

March 25, 2005

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA COUNSELING

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive revises policy for providing Military Sexual Trauma (MST) counseling, care, and services.

2. BACKGROUND

a. Public Law (Pub. L.) 102-585 authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide outreach and establish MST counseling and treatment programs for women veterans who experienced incidents of sexual trauma while on active duty. Pub. L. 103-452 authorized VA to provide MST counseling and treatment to men as well as women. Pub. L. 106-117 expanded the focus on MST Programs to include outreach and extended VA's authority to provide MST programs until December 2004. Pub. L. 108-422 extends VA's authority permanently (without an expiration date) and extends MST counseling and related treatment to active duty for training (ADUTRA) service members.

b. Veterans need to be informed of their eligibility to file a claim for service connected disability compensation and be given the VA Home Page web address (www.va.gov) and phone number (1-800-827-1000) to access more information. It is not necessary for eligible veterans to file a disability claim or provide evidence of the sexual trauma to receive MST counseling and services. **NOTE:** *Women veterans need to be informed of the availability of a Women Veterans Outreach Coordinator at each VA regional office who can assist them with their compensation claims.*

c. Use of MST software allows tracking of VA's screening of veterans. The Women Veterans Health Program (133) and the Mental Health Strategic Work Group utilize the national MST report to respond to Congressional inquiries and for expansion of MST programs and initiatives.

3. POLICY: It is VHA policy to provide military sexual trauma counseling, including appropriate care and services, to overcome psychological trauma that resulted from a physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature or sexual harassment which occurred while the veteran was serving on active duty or while the service member served on Active Duty for Training (ADUTRA) as defined under Title 38 United States Code §101(22). **NOTE:** *The term "active duty for training" does not include duty performed as a temporary member of the Coast Guard Reserve.*

4. ACTION: The Medical Center Director is responsible for ensuring that:

a. A designated MST Coordinator is appointed; that a MST Counselor(s) or team is available so that all enrolled veterans, including Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans, are screened for MST; and that necessary staff education and training is provided.

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b. Veterans receiving MST-related counseling and treatment are not billed for inpatient, outpatient, or pharmaceutical co-payments; however, applicable co-payments may be charged for services not related to military sexual trauma or for other non-service connected conditions.

c. Scheduling priority for outpatient sexual trauma counseling, care, and services is consistent with the VHA performance standard of scheduling within 30 days for special populations and mental health clinics.

d. Accurate documentation of screening, referral, and treatment services provided to veterans, aggregated by gender, is maintained. This process includes use of the MST software and the MST clinical reminder to track and monitor the level of compliance with the standard (100 percent of enrolled veterans screened). The nationwide tracking system to ensure consistent data on screening and treatment of victims of military sexual trauma must be used. ***NOTE:** The use of clinic stop code 524 or Purpose of Visit code 55 of the Fee Package is recommended so that collection of MST treatment data is accessible and consistent across the system.*

e. MST counseling is provided by contract with a qualified mental health professional if it is clinically inadvisable to provide in Departmental facilities or when VA facilities are not capable of furnishing such counseling to the veteran economically because of geographic inaccessibility or the inability of the medical center to provide counseling in a timely manner. ***NOTE:** Referral to the local Readjustment Counseling Service (Vet Center) may be an appropriate alternative.*

f. Veterans who report experiences of MST, but who are otherwise deemed ineligible for VA health care benefits based on length of military service requirements, may be provided MST counseling and related treatment only.

5. REFERENCES

- a. Public Law 102-585, Veterans Health Care Act of 1992, dated November 11, 1992.
- b. Public Law 103-452, Veterans Health Care Extension Act, dated November 2, 1994.
- c. Public Law 106-117, Veterans Millennium Health Care Act, dated November 30, 1999.
- d. Public Law 108-422, Veterans Health Program Improvement Act of 2004, dated November 30, 2004.
- e. Office of Quality and Performance, VHA Fiscal Year 2005 Performance Plan, Network Performance Measures.

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Director, Women Veterans Health Program (133), is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be referred to 202-273-8577.

7. RESCISSIONS: VHA Directives 10-93-021, 10-95-030, 99-039, and 2000-008 are rescinded. This VHA Directive expires March 31, 2010.

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